

BEING (*ENS*), ESSENCE (*ESSENTIA*), AND THE ACT OF BEING (*ESSE*)

Paul Gerard Horrigan, Ph.D., 2013.

Being (*Ens*)

Being (Latin: *ens*; Greek: *ὄν*; German: *Seiend*; French: *étant*) is *that which is* (*ens est id quod est*). Being (*ens*) is *that which has the act of being* (*esse*).¹ Being (*ens*) is *that which participates in the act of being* (*esse*) (*ens est quod participat esse*).² The notion of being (*ens*) is not a simple notion, but implies a composition of a subject (that ‘something’ which *is* and is the real subject to which the act of being belongs), and an act (the very act of being or *esse* of that ‘something’).³ A cat, a dog, a rock are all beings (*entia*). They are all ‘things’ or ‘realities.’ However, strictly speaking, being (*ens*) does not have the same meaning as thing or reality (*res*), for while the term *res* or ‘thing’ is derived from essence (*essentia*), being (*ens*) is derived from *esse* (*dicitur res secundum quod habet quidditatem vel essentiam quamdam; ens vero secundum quod habet esse*).⁴ Being (*ens*) is the present participle of the verb ‘to be’ (Latin: *esse*) and we say that being (*ens*) signifies things in so much as they *are*, somewhat in the same way that a ‘swimmer’ designates a person who swims, or a ‘painter,’ someone who paints, or a ‘student,’ designating someone who studies.

Being (*ens*) is not a simple notion but implies a composition of a subject and an act: “The notion of being (*ens*) is not a ‘simple’ notion; it implies the composition of a subject (*id quod*) and an act (*est*). Two elements are involved in this notion: ‘something’ which is and the very act of being (*esse*) of that thing. That ‘something’ plays the role of a subject, that is, the particular reality to which the *esse* belongs (as the subject of the act of laughing is the person who laughs).

“Nevertheless, the two elements constitute a unity: one element (*ens*) implies the presence of the other element. When we say ‘being’ (*ens*) we refer implicitly to its *esse* even

¹ Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 1, sol.

² *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 4, a. 2, ad 3.

³ Joseph De Torre writes: “*Ens* is that which has the act of being (in Latin: *ens est id quod habet esse*). There may be something which does not actually exist but is only a possibility, but then it is not an *ens* since it does not have the act of being; it is only an essence or ‘possibility of being.’ *Ens*, therefore, is an essence (or manner of being) which has the act of being: *id quod est* or *id quod habet esse*.”

“This shows that *ens* is composite, not simple. It has a composition of (a) subject of the act of being, and (b) act of being. The former is the thing that is; the ‘act of being’ is reality, not just a mere possibility. The two aspects are not the same, because *to be* is one thing, and the *manner of being* is another. This composition is such that the *esse* (to be) is contracted or limited by the essence or manner of being; the *ens* is only what it *can* be, that is, its essence: it is not everything, but only this type of being, this essence.

“We can say that while essence is *that which* the thing is, *esse* is *that by which* the thing is. *Esse*, therefore, is a metaphysical real component or constituent part of the singular concrete being. It is not something that we grasp as a notion itself, because then it would be a noun. It is not a ‘thing,’ but *that by which* any thing is. It is the *actuality* of things, as distinct from their *possibility*. This is why we should not confuse our concepts (abstract essences) with reality or actuality” (J. DE TORRE, *Christian Philosophy*, Sinag-Tala, Manila, 1980, p. 76).

⁴ *In II Sent.*, q. 37, q. 1, a. 1, sol.

though we do not yet for the judgment ‘it is’ or that ‘something is.’ Likewise, when we hear the verb ‘is’ alone, we either assume its subject, or we discover the absence of a subject of the act.

“We can sum this up as follows: 1) Being (*ens*) signifies principally the *thing* which is: being (*ens*) designates it insofar as it has the act of being (*esse*) ; 2) Consequently, being (*ens*) signifies concomitantly the *esse* of that thing, because a thing can only be if it possesses the act of being (*esse*) ; 3) Therefore, being (*ens*) refers to something that exists in reality.”⁵

Essence (*essentia*) is *that which makes a thing to be what it is*, while act of being (*esse*) is *that which makes a thing to be*. Every finite being (*ens*) has a real distinction between essence (*essentia*) and act of being (*esse*) as two metaphysical co-principles.⁶ With God, the Infinite Being, on the other hand, *essentia* and *esse* are identified. God’s Essence is To Be.

Essence (*Essentia*)

The substances we see around us are not simple but are composed of two principles: essence and act of being, the former being related to *esse* as a potency, and the latter being related to *essentia* as act. *Essence* (*essentia*) is the proper potency of the act of being (*esse*) and together with this act constitutes the substance (*substantia*). Essence⁷ confers upon this substance a specific manner of being and is defined as *that by which a thing is what it is*. It is “that through which and in which a being has its act of being (*esse*).”⁸ Essence pertains truly and properly to substance while it pertains to accidents only in a qualified sense. Aquinas writes: “Just as the

⁵ T. ALVIRA, L. CLAVELL, T. MELEND, *Metaphysics*, Sinag-Tala, Manila, 1991, pp. 18-19.

⁶ “Being is a real and intelligible principle, and the knowledge of its reality cannot be separated from the knowledge of its intelligibility. This dissociation has been carried out in formalistic scholasticism which speaks of ‘the distinction between *essence* and *existence*,’ instead of the genuinely metaphysical theory of the real composition of *essence* and *act of being*. The former distinction is made between actual existence, considered as mere facticity, and the essence considered merely as possible. *Essence* and *existence* are, then, no more than two different states of mind with respect to the same thing considered respectively as a possibility, and as actually existing. Existence, in this case, does no more than add the concrete and irrational character of *the fact* to the abstract and intelligible notes of the essence. Some scholastics even ended up speaking about a distinction between the *esse essentiae*, and the *esse actualis existentiae*, which corresponds to a merely logical starting point (as a reply to the question ‘what is a thing’ – *quid est* – and ‘if a thing is’ – *an est* –), but this is a starting point without any metaphysical dimension.

“The real distinction between *essence* and *act of being* is not to be identified with the couple *to be thought* – *to really be*. The authentic real composition of *essentia* – *esse* is not the formal nexus of two modes of a being, but rather the structuring of two real co-principles which make up the primary reality of being.

“This composition is the transcendental structure of reality, which occurs in all finite beings inasmuch as they are beings. This composition of *essence* and *act of being* (*esse*) is real: they are really distinct metaphysical principles which constitute the radical *unum* which is being. It is necessary to admit this composition as real (and not only ‘*cum fundamento in re*’), because finite things are, but they are not the act of being (*esse*), they do not exhaust being (*esse*) either in intensity or in extension. They are, but without being being (*esse*): they have being (*esse*), they participate in being (*esse*). The participating principle (the potency: essence) cannot be really identified with that which is participated (the act: being – *esse*). If essence and *esse* were identified, the real principle of limitation (imperfection) would be the same as the real principle of perfection, which would violate the principle of non-contradiction. There would be no proper explanation for the real existence of finite beings: we would be denying either their reality or their finiteness”(A. LLANO, *Gnoseology*, Sinag-Tala, Manila, 2001, pp. 116-117).

⁷ Studies on essence: J. E. HARE, *Aristotle’s Theories of Essence*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1975 ; C. BIGGER, *St. Thomas on Essence and Participation*, “The New Scholasticism,” 62 (1988), pp. 319-348.

⁸ *De Ente et Essentia*, chapter 1.

term *ens* is applied in the absolute and proper sense only to substance, and to accidents in a secondary, derived way, essence truly and properly pertains to the substance, and to the accidents only in a certain way, and from a certain point of view.”⁹ Therefore, when we refer to the essence of something without qualification we refer to the essence of its substance, not to the essence of its accidents.

Essence as Quiddity, the Universal and Nature

Essence is often times referred to as a *quiddity*, a *universal*, or as a *nature*. Why is this so? Alvira, Clavell and Melendo explain that “as the ‘specification of the mode of being of a thing,’ the essence gives rise to a series of basic properties which give us a better understanding of *essence*. These properties themselves give rise to a set of terms which refer to one and the same reality, while differing with respect to the aspect of that reality which is considered. They are, however, sometimes employed in an undifferentiated way in common usage.”¹⁰

Essence as Nature. As the principle of operations, essence is called *nature*. Nature is essence from the viewpoint of its proper activity. Nature is essence considered as the ultimate principle of operations in a being. Nature is the essence considered as the root principle of activities of a being. It expresses the dynamic character of being. A horse, for example, acts in one way and not in another because it has being in a determinate way, conditioned by its essence. Thus, each nature has a corresponding type of specific operations. Trotting, galloping, eating grass and neighing, for example, are natural to the horse because they are operations which arise from horse nature or horseness itself. “Every being” explains Dougherty, “has certain powers or faculties which dispose it to act in a certain way, such as the faculty to know, the faculty to hear, the powers of a plant for photosynthesis. No finite being acts immediately but rather mediately through certain powers for certain acts. Yet the powers or faculties of a being for acting are not adequate to explain a being’s activities. Uniform and stable patterns of activities are proper to a species because of a basic determination for such uniform and proper activities in the very nature of the species. It is grounded in their very essence or nature.”¹¹

Essence as Quiddity. Insofar as essence is signified by a *definition*, it is called *quiddity* or “whatness.” *Quiddity* is a term derived from the Latin word *quidditas*, which is the technical noun fashioned from *quid* (Latin for “what”). “The reason is obvious” observes Bittle. “When we desire to know what a particular thing really is, we ask the question ‘What is it?’ And in answer to this question we obtain a knowledge of its ‘whatness’; because, in being told what it is that makes this thing to be just this being and not another, we find out its essential elements (essence) in the definition given.”¹²

A *definition* signifies the essence of something by means of its proximate genus and specific difference. It gives an answer to the question “What is it?” The definition of man, for example, would be “rational animal.” This is the metaphysical essence of man. “Animal” would

⁹ *De Ente et Essentia*, chapter 2.

¹⁰ T. ALVIRA, L. CLAVELL, T. MELENDO, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹¹ K. DOUGHERTY, *Metaphysics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, Graymoor Press, Peekskill, NY, 1965, p. 119.

¹² C. BITTLE, *The Domain of Being: Ontology*, Bruce, Milwaukee, 1941, p. 117.

be the proximate genus and “rationality” the specific difference that separates him from all other animals.

Essence as the Universal. Insofar as essence is known, it is possible for it to be referred to many individuals, and for this reason it is called the *universal*. “The essence is really present only in individual things. However, our understanding, setting aside the characteristics which belong to each singular thing, considers the essence as something universal, which can be attributed to all individuals having the same mode of being. In accordance with the way of being which the essence of *this* horse has in the human mind, it becomes a universal which is applicable to all horses. This logical consideration of the essence, that is, the essence as a universal, is what is called *secondary substance*.”¹³

Essence and Esse. Though capable of being utilized in these various senses, essence nevertheless stresses its relationship with *esse*, it being the principle in which the *esse* of a thing is received and by which it is restricted to a determinate form; essence is so called insofar as a thing has *esse* in it and through it. Thus, essence has a meaning over and above that contained in nature, quiddity, and universal as it directs our attention to that which makes things *be*, namely, the act of being (*esse*): “Essence means that through which and in which a being has its act of being (*esse*).”¹⁴

Act of Being (*Esse*)

The principal element of being (*ens*, which is “that which is” or “that which has *esse*”¹⁵) is its act of being (*esse*).¹⁶ If essence (*essentia*) is *that which makes a thing to be what it is*, the act of being (*esse*) is *that which makes a thing to be*.¹⁷

¹³ T. ALVIRA, L. CLAVELL, T. MELENDO, *op. cit.*, p. 91. Owens writes: “The essence can exist in reality and in the human intellect. In reality it exists in individuals, as humanity exists in millions of men. The same essence, humanity, is found separately in every one of these many individuals. It is common to them all. The same essence, moreover, can exist in your intellect or in the intellect of anyone else who thinks of it. In this cognitional existence it is no longer individual but specific. It is the universal species ‘man,’ or human nature in its universality. As a universal, it represents all individual men in the one concept. It has a unity of its own as universal, just as in any particular man it has a unity that is individual”(J. OWENS, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, Center for Thomistic Studies, Houston, 1985, p. 133).

¹⁴ *De Ente et Essentia*, chapter 1.

¹⁵ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 22: “Amplius. Omnis res est per hoc quod habet esse”; *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 26, a. 4: “...ens simpliciter est quod habet esse...” (Leon. 6.190).

¹⁶ Studies on the act of being (*esse*): R. J. HENLE, *Existentialism and the Judgment*, “Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association,” 21 (1946), pp. 40-52 ; H. RENARD, *The Metaphysics of the Existential Judgment*, “The New Scholasticism,” 23 (1949), pp. 387-394 ; M. PONTIFEX, *The Meaning of Esse: A Thomistic View Examined*, “The Downside Review,” 67 (1949), pp. 395-405 ; E. A. SILLEM, *Saint Thomas Aquinas on the Meaning of Esse*, “The Downside Review,” 68 (1950), pp. 414-428 ; M. PONTIFEX, *The Meaning of Esse: A Reply*, “The Downside Review,” 68 (1950), pp. 429-438 ; E. NICOLETTI, *Existencia e actus essendi in S. Tommaso*, “Aquinas,” 1 (1958), pp. 241-267 ; C. FABRO, *La problematica dell’esse Tomistico*, “Aquinas,” 2 (1959), pp. 194-225 ; H. J. JOHN, *The Emergence of the Act of Existing in Recent Thomism*, “International Philosophical Quarterly,” 2 (1962), pp. 595-620 ; C. FABRO, *Per la determinazione dell’essere Tomistico*, “Aquinas,” 5 (1962), pp. 170-205 ; D. O’GRADY, *Further Notes on ‘Being,’ ‘Esse,’ and ‘Essence’ in an Existential Metaphysics*, “International Philosophical Quarterly,” 3 (1963), pp. 610-616 ; D. O’GRADY, *Esse and Metaphysics*, “The New Scholasticism,” 39 (1965), pp. 283-294 ; C. FABRO, *The Transcendentality of “Ens-Esse” and the Ground of Metaphysics*, “International Philosophical Quarterly,” 6 (1966), pp. 389-487 ; C. FABRO, *Notes pour la fondation métaphysique de l’être*, “Revue Thomiste,” 66 (1966), pp. 214-237 ; J. MARITAIN, *Réflexions sur la nature blessée et sur*

l'intuition de l'être, "Revue Thomiste," 68 (1968), pp. 5-40 ; F. D. WILHELMSSEN, *The Triplex Via and the Transcendence of Esse*, "The New Scholasticism," 44 (1970), pp. 223-235 ; E. GILSON, *Propos sur l'être et sa notion*, in *Studi tomistici (III): San Tommaso e il pensiero moderno*, Rome, 1974, pp. 7-17 ; C. GIACON, *Il contributo originale di S. Tommaso all'ontologia classica*, in *Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo VII centenario. Congresso internazionale*, Rome-Naples, 1974, pp. 281-294 ; J. OWENS, *Aquinas on Knowing Existence*, "Review of Metaphysics," 29 (1976), pp. 670-690 ; F. D. WILHELMSSEN, *The Concept of Existence and the Structure of Judgment: A Thomistic Paradox*, "The Thomist," 41 (1977), pp. 317-349 ; F. D. WILHELMSSEN, *Existence and Esse*, "The New Scholasticism," 50 (1976), pp. 20-45 ; A. DALLEDONNE, *L'autentico 'esse' Tomistico e l'equivoco neoscolastico sulla 'esistenza come atto' in Carlo Giacon*, "Divus Thomas," (1978), pp. 68-82 ; J. R. CATAN, *Aristotele e San Tommaso intorno all'actus essendi*, "Rivista di Filosofia Neo-scolastica," 73 (1981), pp. 639-655 ; J. C. MALONEY, *Esse in the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas*, "The New Scholasticism," 55 (1981), pp. 159-177 ; M. GIGANTE, *'Actus essendi' e atto libero nel pensiero di S. Tommaso*, in *Atti del VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, vol. 5, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1982, pp. 249-282 ; J. NIJENHUIS, *'To Be' or 'To Exist': That is the Question*, "The Thomist," 50 (1986), pp. 353-394 ; R. DIODATO, *Tra Esse e Deissi: Note per una conferma linguistica dell'ontologia gilsoniana*, "Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica," 78 (1986), pp. 3-33 ; O. J. GONZALEZ, *The Apprehension of the Act of Being in Aquinas*, "American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly," 68.4 (1995), pp. 475-500 ; P. P. RUFFINENGO, *L'ipsum esse non è ancora l'actus essendi di S. Tommaso*, "Aquinas," 38 (1995), pp. 631-635 ; L. DEWAN, *St. Thomas and the Distinction Between Form and Esse in Caused Things*, "Gregorianum," 80.2 (1999), pp. 353-370 ; S. L. BROCK, *On Whether Aquinas's Ipsum Esse is Platonism*, "Review of Metaphysics," 60 (2006), pp. 723-757 ; S. L. BROCK, *Harmonizing Plato and Aristotle on Esse: Thomas Aquinas and the De hebdomadibus*, "Nova et Vetera," English Edition, 5.3 (2007), pp. 465-494 ; M. PAOLINI PAOLETTI, *Esse ut actus e giudizio d'esistenza: sulla riflessione metafisica di É. Gilson*, "Euntes Docete," 63.1 (2010), pp. 191-215 ; M. PAOLINI PAOLETTI, *Conoscere l'essere: Fabro, Gilson e la conoscenza dell'actus essendi*, in *Crisi e destino della filosofia: Studi su Cornelio Fabro*, edited by A. Acerbi, EDUSC, Rome, 2012, pp. 157-172 ; J. MITCHELL, *Being and Participation: The Method and Structure of Metaphysical Reflection According to Cornelio Fabro*, 2 vols, Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, Rome, 2012.

¹⁷ Explaining certain features of the act of being (*esse*) as act, Alvira, Clavell and Melendo state: "a) Above all, *esse* is an act, that is, a perfection of all reality. The term 'act' is used in metaphysics to designate any perfection or property of a thing; therefore, it is not to be used exclusively to refer to actions or operations (the act of seeing or walking, for instance). In this sense, a white rose is a flower that has whiteness as an act which gives the rose a specific perfection. Similarly, that 'is' which is applied to things indicates a perfection as real as the perfection of 'life' in living things. In the case of *esse*, however, we are obviously dealing with a special perfection.

"b) *Esse* is a 'universal' act, that is, it belongs to all things. *Esse* is not exclusive to some particular kind of reality, since without *esse*, there would be nothing at all. Whenever we talk about anything, we have to acknowledge, first of all, that it is: the bird 'is,' gold 'is,' the clouds 'are.'

"c) *Esse* is also a 'total' act: it encompasses all that a thing is. While other acts only refer to some part or aspects of being, *esse* is a perfection which includes everything that a thing has, without any exception. Thus, the 'act of reading' does not express the entirety of the perfection of the person reading, but *esse* is the act of each and of all the parts of a thing. If a tree 'is,' then the whole tree 'is,' with all its aspects and parts – its color, shape, life and growth – in short, everything in it shares in its *esse*. Thus, *esse* encompasses the totality of a thing.

"*Esse* is a 'constituent' act, and the most radical or basic of all perfections because it is that by which things 'are.' As essence is that which makes a thing to be this or that (chair, lion, man), *esse* is that which makes things to be. This can be seen from various angles:

"(i) *Esse* is the most common of all acts. What makes all things to be cannot reside in their principles of diversity (their essence), but precisely in that act whereby they are all alike, namely, the act of being.

"(ii) *Esse* is by nature prior to any other act. Any action or property presupposes a subsisting subject in which it inheres, but *esse* is presupposed by all actions and all subjects, for without it, nothing would be. Hence *esse* is not an act derived from what things are; rather it is precisely what makes them to be.

"(iii) We have to conclude, by exclusion, that *esse* is the constituent act. No physical or biological property of beings – their energy, molecular or atomic structure – can make things be, since all of these characteristics, in order to produce their effects, must, first of all, be.

"In short, *esse* is the first and innermost act of a being which confers on the subject, from within, all of its perfections. By analogy, just as the soul is the 'form' of the body by giving life to it, *esse* intrinsically 'actualizes' every single thing. The soul is the principle of life, but *esse* is the principle of entity or reality of all things"(T. ALVIRA, L. CLAVELL, T. MELENDO, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22).

The act of being (*esse*) is the most intensive act as it, in its pure state, contains in itself all perfections. Finite beings have varying degrees of perfections as they participate in the act of being (*esse*) according to their determinate essences, the essence co-principle limiting the act of being co-principle. Individual beings possess *esse* in different degrees of intensity. Insects, for example, participate in the act of being in a much less intense way than say, a dog. A human person participates in the act of being in a much more intense way than a horse. God alone is Pure Act of Being, in whom act of being and essence are identified. Only God is All-Perfect, possessing the act of being in all its fullness and intensity, infinitely surpassing all the perfections of the entire created universe. God, Pure Act of Being, without any potentiality (potentiality or potency understood in the strict sense of passive potency), is devoid of any imperfection and limitation, being the Absolute Perfection and Infinite Being. On the other hand, created things, which are finite and limited, possess a limited and less intense act of being (*esse as actus essendi*), which is a participated *esse*, and the more imperfect they are, the lesser act of being (*esse as actus essendi*) do they participate in. The diversity and intensity of degrees of perfections possessed by the finite beings created by God the *Esse Divinum, Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, have their foundation in the diverse ways of possessing, participating in, the act of being (*esse*), for the source of an individual being's perfection is its act of being (*esse as actus essendi*) efficiently produced *ex nihilo* by the *Esse Divinum, Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. St. Thomas Aquinas states in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 28: "Every perfection of a thing belongs to it in accordance with its *esse*. Man would not have any perfection through his wisdom unless he is wise by virtue of the latter, and the same thing applies in other cases. Thus, the perfection of a thing depends on the manner it has *esse*; for it is said to be more or less perfect in accordance with the way its *esse* is contracted in a more perfect or less perfect manner. Consequently, there is one to whom all the actuality of *esse* (*tota virtus essendi*) belongs, he cannot lack any perfection proper to anything whatsoever. Rather, this reality, which is its own *esse*, has the act of being in all its fullness (*totam essendi potestatem*)."

Studies on Thomistic participation metaphysics: C. A. HART, *Participation and the Thomistic Five Ways*, "The New Scholasticism," 26 (1952), pp. 267-282 ; W. NORRIS CLARKE, *The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas Aquinas*, "Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association," 26 (1952), pp. 147-157 ; L. B. GEIGER, *La participation dans la philosophie de St. Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris, 1953 ; G. LINDBECK, *Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas*, "Franciscan Studies," 17 (1957), pp. 1-22, 107-125 ; C. FABRO, *Partecipazione e causalità*, S.E.I., Turin, 1961 ; H. J. JOHN, *Participation Revisited*, "The Modern Schoolman," 39 (1962), pp. 154-165 ; C. FABRO, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*, 3rd ed., S.E.I. Turin, 1963 ; J. ARTOLA, *Creación y participación*, Publicaciones de la Institución Aquinas, Madrid, 1963 ; C. FABRO, *Elementi per una dottrina tomistica della partecipazione*, "Divinitas," 2 (1967), pp. 559-586 ; P. C. COURTÈS, *Participation et contingence selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, "Revue Thomiste," 77 (1969), pp. 201-235 ; J. CHIU YUEN HO, *La doctrine de la participation dans le Commentaire de Saint Thomas sur le "Liber de Causis"*, "Revue philosophique de Louvain," 27 (1972), pp. 360-383 ; T. FAY, *Participation: The Transformation of Platonic and Neoplatonic Thought in the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas*, "Divus Thomas," 76 (1973), pp. 50-64 ; O. N. DERISI, *Participación, acto y potencia y analogía en Santo Tomás*, "Revista di filosofia neoscholastica," 65 (1974), pp. 415-435 ; C. FABRO, *The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation*, "The Review of Metaphysics," 27 (1974), pp. 449-491 ; O. N. DERISI, *La existencia o esse imparticipado divino, causa de todo ser participado*, "Sapientia," 31 (1976), pp. 109-120 ; P. LAZZARO, *La dialettica della partecipazione nella Summa contra Gentiles di S. Tommaso d'Aquino*, Paralelo, Reggio Calabria, 1976 ; K. REISENHUBER, *Participation as a Structuring Principle in Thomas Aquinas' Teaching on Divine Names*, "Studies in Medieval Thought," 20 (1978), pp. 240-242 ; A. BASAVE, *La doctrina metafísica de la participación en santo Tomás de Aquino*, "Giornale di Metafisica," 30 (1979), pp. 257-266 ; A. L. GONZÁLEZ, *Ser y participación*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1979 ; O. N. DERISI, *El fundamento de la metafísica tomista: El Esse e Intelligere Divino, fundamento y causa de todo ser y entender participados*, "Sapientia," 35 (1980), pp. 9-26 ; O. N. DERISI, *Del ente participado al Ser imparticipado*, "Doctor Communis," 35 (1982), pp. 26-38 ; O. N. DERISI, *La participación del ser*, "Sapientia," 37 (1982), pp. 5-10, 83-86, 243-248 ; P. MAZZARELLA, *Creazione, partecipazione, e tempo secondo san Tommaso d'Aquino*, "Studia Patavina," (1982), pp. 308-335 ; O. N. DERISI, *La participación de la esencia*, in *Cinquant'anni di Magistero Teologico. Scritti in onore di Mons. Antonio Piolanti*, "Studi tomistici" (26), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1985, pp. 173-184 ; C. FABRO, *Partecipazione agostiniana e partecipazione tomistica*, "Doctor Communis," 39 (1986), pp. 282-291 ; J. F. WIPPEL, *Thomas Aquinas and Participation*, in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1987, pp. 117-158 ; C. P. BIGGER, *St. Thomas on Essence and Participation*, "The New Scholasticism," 62 (1988), pp. 319-348 ; T. TYN, *Metafisica della sostanza. Partecipazione e analogia entis*, Edizioni Studio Domenicano, Bologna, 1991, pp. 18-20, 523-583, 813-933 ; R. A. TE VELDE, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Brill, Leiden, 1995 ; J.

In *De Potentia Dei*, St. Thomas writes: “The act of being (*esse*)...signifies the highest perfection of all...the act of being (*esse*)...is the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections”(“*esse est inter omnia perfectissimum...esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum*”).¹⁸ In *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3 Aquinas states of the act of being (*esse*): “The act of being (*esse*) is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so far as it *is*. Hence the act of being (*esse*) is that which actuates all things, even their forms. Therefore it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received; but rather as the received to the receiver”(*Ipsium esse est perfectissimum omnium: comparatur enim ad omnia ut actus. Nihil enim habet actualitatem, nisi in quantum est: unde ipsum esse est actualitas omnium rerum, et etiam ipsarum formarum. Unde non comparatur ad alia sicut recipiens ad receptum, sed magis sicut receptum ad recipiens*).”¹⁹

Étienne Gilson points out that Aquinas’s teaching of the positing of the act of being (*esse*) above form “was nothing less than a revolution. He had precisely to achieve the dissociation of the two notions of form and act. This is precisely what he has done and what probably remains, even today, the greatest contribution ever made by any single man to the science of being.”²⁰ Therefore, continues Gilson, “supreme in their own order, substantial forms remain the prime acts of their substances, but, though there be no form of the form, there is an act of the form. In other words, the form is such an act as still remains in potency to another act, namely, the act of being (*esse*).”²¹

As supreme and ultimate act in order of substance or essence, the form makes a thing to be *what* it will be if it is to be, but supreme and ultimate as it is, form cannot make this thing to be a being. This is the case, since there is needed from another order an act which is still more supreme and still more ultimate: the act of being (*esse*): “The act of being (*esse*) itself is the highest act in which all things are capable of participating, but the act of being (*esse*) itself does not participate in anything (“*ipsum esse est actus ultimus qui participabilis est ab omnibus, ipsum autem nihil participat*).”²²

Of the fundamental and primary doctrine of the act of being (*esse*) that is at the heart of the metaphysics of the Angelic Doctor, Gilson states: “This doctrine is situated at the center of Thomism...To say that *esse* is related as an act, even to the form itself – *ad ipsam etiam formam comparatur esse ut actus* – is to assert the radical primacy of *esse* over essence...Understood in this way, the act of being (*esse*) is put at the heart, or, if one prefers, at the very root of reality. It is therefore the principle of the principles of reality.”²³

F. WIPPEL, *Participation and the Problem of the One and the Many*, in J. F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2000, pp. 94-131 ; T. TYN, *Partecipazione*, in T. Tyn, *Metafisica della Sostanza: Partecipazione e analogia entis*, Fede e Cultura, Verona, 2009, pp. 562-624 ; J. MITCHELL, *Being and Participation: The Method and Structure of Metaphysical Reflection According to Cornelio Fabro*, 2 vols, Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, Rome, 2012.

¹⁸ *De Potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

¹⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

²⁰ É. GILSON, *Being and Some Philosophers*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1952, p. 174.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Q. D. De Anima*, q. 6, ad 2.

²³ E. GILSON, *Le Thomisme*, fifth edition, Vrin, Paris, 1947, p. 50.